

## Fire Medal Day 2004

The extraordinary valor and exceptional courage of 51 FDNY members was highlighted at the annual Fire Medal Day on June 2 at City Hall.

"Today for the 135th time in the history of the world's greatest fire department, we gather to honor the bravest of our bravest," Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in his opening remarks. "As members of the FDNY you are charged with the most fundamental, important duty of all - the responsibility to save lives no matter what the situation."

Fire Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta echoed the Mayor's comments, "Members of this department always push on no matter what the odds," he said.

Firefighter James Mills of Ladder Company 176 received the James Gordon Bennett Medal, the Department's highest honor, and the New York State Honorary Fire Chiefs Association Medal. Mills earned the medals for saving the life of Firefighter Robert Petrarca of Ladder 120 at a March 4, 2003 fire on Pitkin Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

Mills located Petrarca in the cellar of the two-story taxpayer type building. Even though Mills' own PASS alarm was going off due to low air in his SCBA, he still dragged Petrarca toward the stairs.

"With all this going on, Firefighter Mills may have left and communicated Firefighter Petrarca's position once safe outside himself," Deputy Chief Daniel Butler wrote in his endorsement. "Instead, he decided he would leave when they both left."



March 4, 2003 fire on Pitkin Avenue in Brownsville, Brooklyn.



Mayor Bloomberg awards Firefighter James Mills of Ladder Company 176 the James Gordon Bennett Medal at City Hall on June 2nd.

After FF Petrarca was located, members of Ladder 176 made a breach in the cellar wall, and members of Rescue 4 were then able to assist with the removal. Shortly after the rescue, a collapse occurred that would have trapped both men had it not been for Mills' swift action.

### Other Highlights

Engine Company 52 in the Bronx was honored with the New York Firefighters Burn Center Foundation Medal. Lt. Stephen Chase, FF Lawrence Brigati (Engine 79, retired), FF Russell Dinkler, FF Brian McGowan, FF Kevin McNichol and FF Eddy Nietzsche were awarded

the medal for their valiant actions when responding to a fire in a six-story multiple dwelling during the early morning hours of August 15, 2003 - the night of the citywide blackout.

"The severe conditions encountered, coupled with the absence of any backup

unit, required an uncommon level of teamwork, dedication and tenacity in order to successfully contain this fire with a minimum of injuries and no loss of life," Deputy Chief Lawrence Benson of Division 7 wrote in his formal recommendation for a unit citation.

Ladder Company 106 was honored with the Firefighter Thomas Elsasser Memorial Medal for their heroic actions during the August blackout. Lt. Gerald Duffy, FF Robert Damino, FF Michael Duffy, FF Mark Hershey, FF Robert McCormick, FF Mario Polit and FF Steven Rueckheim were called to a fire in a four-story brick building in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Disregarding personal safety, members of Ladder 106 saved four lives during the chaotic night - initially entering the building without the protection of a hose line or engine company. They successfully located and rescued civilians from the second and third floors of the building with FF McCormick removing his bunker coat in order to shield a victim and FF Duffy using his face piece to aid in reviving a male victim who was removed to safety.